



STATE OF TENNESSEE
TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Youth Transitions Advisory Council

October 7, 2021
1:00 pm – 3:00 p.m. Central
WebEx

Meeting Summary

Participants

Aleska Loch
Anessia Smith
Bill Latimer
Brandi Osborne
Brent Robinson
Cara Suvall
Carrie Mason
Chaney Cruz
Cheryl Paris
Courtney Matthews
Danielle Rochelle
Dave Aguzzi
Debbie Miller
Ginger Harris
Jane Fleishman

Jerri Moore
Jessica Mullins
Jolene Sharp
Jon Berestecky
Julia Barlar
Karen Nichols
Katie Cannon
Kendra Mitchell
Krystal Fortney
Kylie Burns
Lauren Tahash
Melissa McGee
Morgan Morris
Nathan Harmening
Nicole Bugg

Richard Kennedy
Russette Marcum-Embry
Sabrina Fillers
Sherry Taylor
Stephanie Athalone
Steve Petty
Susan Cope
Sydney
Taurean Haynes
Tiffany Turnage
Toni Shaw
Troy Jenkins
Wendy Spence

Welcome, Introductions, and Announcements – Richard Kennedy Executive Director, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY)

Richard Kennedy welcomed the participants, announced that the meeting would be recorded and asked for approval of the August xx meeting summary.

Sharp moved to approve; Osborne seconded the motion. The meeting summary was approved.

Youth Opportunity Clinic Vanderbilt University School of Law

Cara Suvall, Associate Clinical Professor of Law, Vanderbilt University School of Law

Suvall is a law professor and practicing lawyer runs the Youth Opportunity Clinic. The clinic works with teenagers and young adults in their twenties to overcome barriers they face dealing with collateral consequences coming out of the juvenile or criminal system. They do not represent them in court. Those issues might be related to housing, employment, licensing for certain jobs and other spill-over issues. Sometimes there are direct issues such as court debt, driver's license reinstatement expungement. The second issue is education advocacy such as special education or behavior issues that might prevent completing a high school degree. All the services the clinic provides are free and the students are certified by the Tennessee Supreme Court to be student attorneys. The clinic limits its work to Middle Tennessee. Cara can be reached at Cara.suvall@vanderbilt.edu Youth.opportunity@vanderbilt.edu Ph:615-343-2659

Petty asked if there were other legal clinics serving youth around the state. There are other clinics working with specific subject matter but not specifically with youth. The University of Tennessee has a re-entry clinic. There is a housing clinic here at Vanderbilt

Tennessee Housing and Development Agency (THDA)

Toni Shaw, THDA

Shaw provided information on the Tennessee Housing Trust Fund Competitive Housing Grant Program for affordable rental housing. The grant amount has increased to \$600,000 due to increased construction costs. Those eligible to apply are 501(C)3 non-profits, governments, development districts and public housing authorities. Eligible activities include new construction, renovation, and acquisition. Additional points up to seven are provided

for those providing housing for youth aging out of foster care. Other priority populations include ex-offenders, homeless veterans, extremely low income individuals, or projects located in distressed or rural counties.

The workshop is October 21, 2022, no registration is required. Shaw can be contacted at tshaw@thda.org

Jon Berestecky reported that their Tennessee Region continuum of care was selected by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a YHDP, that's Youth Homeless Demonstration Program, a competitive grant awarded to areas to create homeless assistance programs for young folks aged 18 to 25. The award is for \$2.2 million. The money is usually ongoing and requires the input from young adults with lived experience. They already have a Young Adult Advocacy Board made up of seven 18 to 25 year-olds who have experienced homelessness and are prioritizing the programs to be featured in the eleven county region and what agencies will conduct those programs.

Office of Independent Living, Department of Children's Services

Courtney Matthews, Director of Office of Independent Living, Dave Aguzzi, Assistant Director, Ginger Harris, Youth Engagement Coordinator

Matthews introduced Ginger Harris and welcomed her back to the Office of Independent Living as the new Youth Engagement Coordinator.

Matthews reported on the federal legislation Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act. The act prevented youth from aging out of foster care and allowed youth to re-enter foster care, waiving the education components until September 30, 2021.

Extensive planning was done for the 150 young adults whose services ended at that time. Each of those youth had a discharge plan and had some where to go. Many of the youth had used the additional time to get into school and saved some money for their future stability.

The second part of the legislation was direct financial assistance to young people. Youth that were in foster care at age of fourteen or older currently between the ages of 18 and 27 were eligible for a one time stimulus payment. The Office is currently still providing stimulus payments for youth up to age 21 and accepting applications at this site

<https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/youth-in-transition/youth-resources/pandemic-aid-former-tn-foster-youth.html>

The Office contracted with Youth Villages to provide stimulus payments to youth as soon as possible and avoid delays inherent in the state system.

Aguzzi reported that the number of youth served in Extension of Foster Care Services (EFCS) continued to trend up and especially the number active. The total EFCS served in FY 2022 up to the end of August is 578 with 523 currently active. The total served in FY 2021 was 413 with 320. However, services for those over 21 or not currently meeting education eligibility are ending and the numbers are likely to come down for October.

Aguzzi stated there were two ways DCS was providing direct financial assistance. One is for stimulus payments provided directly to the young people. There are two rates for these stimulus payments one for the public or for youth receiving YVLifeSet and one for youth in EFCS who receive significantly more assistance already. Many payment requests already approved are awaiting additional information from the youth. Assistance can also be provided for specific assistance to help pay for rent, or car repairs. These payments are made directly to the vendor. Aguzzi added that there have been over 3500 applications for assistance, many duplicates and even triplicates from youth and some from persons ineligible.

Matthews also stated there had been interest from DCS administration and the Governor's office about expansion of Extension of Foster Care Services.

Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Update

Jessica Mullins, Director, Youth & Young Adult Initiatives

Mullins introduced new staff with the Office of Children, Youth and Young Adults. Krystal Fortney is the new Project Director for Heathy Transitions. Morgan Morris is directing the Statewide Young Adult Leadership Council and the Certified Young Adult Peer Support Specialist Program.

The First Episode Psychosis Initiative (FEPI) program that serves young adults has expanded to three new sites. In Montgomery County the Mental Health Cooperative will be providing those services. In Anderson County the program will be provided by Ridgeview Behavior Health. In Rutherford County Volunteer Behavioral Health will be providing the services there. The services are being funded with COVID Relief funding that is temporary but should still last through 2025. The five other FEPI sites in the four largest cities and the Northwest Region continue to provide services.

Youth and Young Adult Initiatives just provided the first 40 hour virtual training in the Certified Young Adult Peer Support Specialist Program that was launched in May. Ten young people with lived experience with a mental health or substance abuse or co-occurring disorder attended and will be providing peer support once they complete their required hours of

supervision. If anyone knows someone who is interested in becoming a Certified Young Adult Peer Support Specialist the link to the information is below. You must be between 18 and 30 and a year into recovery or a wellness journey.

<https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/mental-health-services/peers/cyapss.html>

The Young Adult Leadership Council is meeting virtually the second Saturday of each month from 12:00pm to 3:00pm. They do leadership development, talk about mental health, and provide a lot of feedback for the Department.

The fourth Early Episode Psychosis conference was held in September with almost 400 people in attendance. A group known as Students with Psychosis kicked off the conference.

Update from Resource Centers

Helen Ross McNabb

Matthews provided the update for Helen Ross McNabb in Knoxville. A few of the youth are living at the independent program. It is in the same building, but it is under construction, so the internet is spotty. Staff are teaching Sisters Saving Sisters and Manhood classes to the two residential group homes. Opportunity Passport classes are offered in the odd months of the year. Classes are taught online or in person. Youth needs for food, housing, work, and transportation have increased. There has been more participation from LGBTQ youth.

River City Youth Collective

Nichols introduced new staff. Cheryl Paris is the new Program Manager after working with DCS for 30 years. Stephanie Athalone is the new Program Specialist.

Youth are now attending in person since school has started. Youth are glad to be able to get out and attend classes. River City is planning an open house at the newest location and accepting referrals for males. There are also a couple of female beds available. DCS and Youth Villages will be coming to tour the facility.

Paris introduced herself and stated she was glad to get back to working with the young people. Many of them are working on goals like completing HI Set or attending Chattanooga State. Some need more motivation to work on their goals.

South Memphis Alliance, Dreamseekers

Turnage reported on a new program at South Memphis Alliance (SMA), Dreamseekers Career and Real Work Program. It is a 16 week program that combines personal development, job-readiness, and vocational training with two years supportive assistance. It is offered to young people 18 to 30 who have been in foster care. The program is funded for 3 years with a \$300,000 grant from Cummins to serve 25 young people a year.

Haynes reported that a lot of youth at Dreamseekers had received the stimulus funds from DCS. Youth have also received vouchers for housing, some after only two weeks on the waiting list. SMA is reaching out to alumni to come back and be mentors to the youth. Dreamseekers have also started a board with their young people who meet four times per month to plan and voice their opinions about what activities should be taking place at SMA.

Matthews reported that Memphis was awarded a YHDP as was reported in Chattanooga to house homeless youth, joining Oasis in Nashville that was awarded one a couple of years ago.

Department of Health, Children with Special Health Care Needs.

Mitchell is the Director of Integrated Systems of Services focusing on youth engagement. Mitchell reported on Emergency Alert Child with Special Needs Decals. The purpose of the decals is to alert first responders, law enforcement and other emergency personnel that there is a special needs child or youth in the home or vehicle to help bridge any negative outcomes that may result in emergency situations. The Department of Health launched the program in May 2021. The decals are provided to families of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs along with a card to fill out with important information about the child such as name, date of birth, height, weight, diagnosis, and calming methods.

Update from Resource Centers

Monroe Harding Youth Connections

Cheney Cruz is the Director of Education for Youth Connections the Resource Center in Nashville. Youth Connections continues to provide services virtually but are open by appointment. Sixty-five people, in 14 cohorts have been served in the Works Wonders program in the first year. All the participants either gained employment, kept employment, increased their hours or their hourly income. Two new cohorts beginning in November. In the Education Department Youth Connections provides an online diploma program, a HI SET program, and a post-secondary program. They had the biggest graduation ever in June and since that time have had five additional graduates in the online diploma and HI SET programs. They have a new post-secondary program serving 55 youth in their first year. Part of the success of the program is due to their partnership with Nashville State. There is a counselor on campus several days a week assisting youth meeting with their professors and tutoring students. They are kicking off a fund raiser for their older youth program and showed a video of one of the youth who was a recent graduate of the HI SET program and is currently enrolled in Nashville State.

Youth Transitions Advisory Council Annual Report

Petty lead discussion about new recommendations that had been submitted for the Annual Report. The submissions are listed below.

Proposed New YTAC Recommendations

1. Change the name of Extension of Foster Care Services
2. Tennessee should work on having more internships and mentoring opportunities to give youth resources both in knowledge and connections (Business and Personal).
3. Tennessee should focus on the basics of getting a plan for all youth to have a high school diploma or equality before 18 or have a concrete supportive plan in place.

The Council declined to include the recommendation to change the name of Extension of Foster Care Services. DCS does not think changing the name would influence the number of youth who accept services and should focus instead on better outreach. DCS will discuss the name with the Young Adult Advisory Council.

The Council accepted the second recommendation for inclusion. The most important thing a young person can have is a relationship with a caring adult.

The Council declined to include the third recommendation due to a lack of specificity. Youth must be working on completing their education goals to be eligible for Extension of Foster Care Services.

Spence stated that this was an issue that had been discussed at the Mid-Cumberland Council on Children and Youth as many youth DCS seemed to have trouble meeting graduation requirements.

DCS does track graduations and that information is included in the YTAC Annual Report. This subject will be included on a future meeting agenda.

Two current recommendations address the need for task forces to address issues with youth legal issues and transportation.

Mason stated that legal issues had not been addressed by the Administrative Office of the Courts, Court Improvement Project.

Harmening, Director of Independent Living at Omnivision, reported on efforts to address transportation and volunteered to serve on a task force to address transportation.

Sharp shared that the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) had a

working group on transportation for people with disabilities and the Department of Transportation had created an Office of Accessible Transportation that might have relevance for transition age youth. Sharp also volunteered to participate in a task force addressing transportation needs of youth. Sharp also shared a link to the Office of Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan.

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/multimodaltransportation/omat/TDOT%20Mobility%20and%20Accessible%20Transportation Report%20and%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/multimodaltransportation/omat/TDOT%20Mobility%20and%20Accessible%20Transportation%20Report%20and%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf)

Petty reported on his participation in a town hall with the Office of Accessible Transportation.

Matthews suggested partnering with Tennessee Kids Belong, Foster Forward Campaign to determine if they might assist with obtaining vehicles.

There were no further announcements.

Kennedy stated that the date of the next meeting would be determined but that it would be sometime in the Spring and there would be a joint meeting with the Council on Children's Mental Health again in June. Meetings were also scheduled for August 11 and October 6, 2022.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25pm.